

TESTIMONY FOR PUBLIC HEARING ON BILL HB 6380

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I have been legally blind since birth. As a result, my family decided to immigrate to the United States from Chile to see if there was anything the doctors in the U.S could do for me. I arrived in May, 1978. In September of that year I entered high school and was referred to the Board of education and Services for the Blind. Ever since then, the agency has been a part of my life. BESB has provided services like: Mobility, Vocational Rehabilitation, and currently I run a business through the Business Enterprise Program. I have a vending stand at Bridgeport Community Mental Health. My daughter also receives services from BESB in the Children's Services Program as a visual impaired student. My daughter has really enjoyed the summer camp provided by BESB, especially waterskiing and horseback riding. Without BESB she wouldn't have access to such activities or the accommodations in the classroom. As far as I'm concerned, BESB has been of great assistance to me and my family.

I oppose bill HB 6380 because it would negatively impact my life as a blind resident of Connecticut. Currently, if I have any questions or concerns regarding services like mobility, help with my business or adaptive equipment, I know who to call. BESB is a one-stop agency to handle the needs of the blind in Connecticut. If this were to change, I would have to figure out where to get the services needed to continue to be independent. Unfortunately for me, despite best efforts, my vision has decreased steadily throughout the years. I need BESB more than ever in order to maintain my independence and productivity. I am concerned about this budget proposal. If this passes, I don't know what would happen to my business, Perhaps I would be forced to close and find other employment. If that were so, where could I go for services? This question plagues my mind at this moment.

In short, I urge the committee to oppose bill HB 6380 presented by Gov. Malloy. BESB must remain intact so it can continue providing services for blind residents in Connecticut. I ask, "can you put a price tag on independence and equality"?